

SUCCESS STORY

Communities Putting Prevention to Work

Rhode Island

Using Retail Surveillance to Reduce Youth Smoking Initiation

The Rhode Island Tobacco Control Program (TCP) has helped the state achieve one of the lowest smoking rates among youth in the United States.¹ Between 2001 and 2011, the prevalence of cigarette smoking among Rhode Island high school students declined from 24.8% to 11.4%.^{2,3} This decline can be attributed to the state's comprehensive tobacco control efforts, including the implementation of a state-wide smoke-free law in 2005 that prohibits smoking in all indoor areas of workplaces and public places, including restaurants and bars.^{4,5} The state also has consistently increased its cigarette excise tax rate. In 2009, the tax per pack was increased to \$3.46, making it the highest of any state in the United States at the time.⁶ At a cost of \$3.50 per pack, Rhode Island currently has the third highest state cigarette tax in the United States.⁷

To further decrease youth smoking rates, the Rhode Island TCP considered additional programmatic strategies. They recognized the need for increased awareness of the tobacco retail environment and its influence on tobacco use among young people.⁸ Of the tobacco industry's \$8.4 billion annual cigarette advertising and promotional expenditures in 2011,⁹ much of it was spent in and around retail stores. The situation is compounded by the fact that this figure does not include marketing for all of the tobacco industry's products. This includes cigars, smokeless tobacco, and electronic cigarettes.

Exposure to tobacco product advertising and promotion has also been shown to be associated with the initiation and progression of tobacco use among young people.^{10,11} The TCP developed an initiative to better understand the amount and placement of retail tobacco product advertising and promotions, as well as the number and location of retailers that sell cigarettes across Rhode Island.⁷



This information is important to understand the extent of youths exposure to tobacco product advertising in retail settings and what tobacco products young people had access to within neighborhoods. This includes school and college zones, and how local zoning regulations may influence tobacco product access, initiation, and use among young people. The Rhode Island TCP initiated this work with funding support through a 2-year cooperative agreement from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) program.

Before this initiative, the Rhode Island TCP had never collected information on advertising and placement of tobacco products in retail settings.⁸ The TCP was able to use previously developed tools to create their own survey tool.¹² In a convenience sample of 501 tobacco-vending stores in close proximity to Rhode Island schools, the survey tool was used to gather information on product price, flavor, and placement of specific brands of little cigars, cigarillos, snus, snuff, and dissolvable tobacco.¹³ Special offers and price promotions were also observed. In total, data were collected within 36 different communities in Rhode Island.⁸

Technical assistance and training enabled community planning teams and residents to gain a better understanding of the promotion and marketing of tobacco products within the retail environment and its influence on consumers. Additionally, TCP staff members were successful at training community partners on how to use the survey tool, which strengthened their ability to gain support and approval from retailers to examine their businesses. Preliminary results estimated that 58% of the stores sampled had flavored Cheyenne little cigars, 62% had other brands of flavored cigarillos, 60% had flavored snus, and 52% had flavored snuff.¹³ Swisher single pack cigars on the counter were at 14% of the stores, and other brands of cigarillos on the counter were at 15% of the stores. Special prices and multipack discounts on cigarillos were at 11% of the stores in the sample; however, none of the stores sampled offered free gifts.¹³

The Rhode Island TCP felt that without information on the extent of retail tobacco product advertising and promotion, it was impossible to know the influence these exposures had on youth smoking initiation and use across the state. Flavored, inexpensive, tobacco products are not only present, but also visible and placed within stores that are frequented by children and youth.¹³ Rhode Island TCP's effort to gather and share store observation data can help communities begin to address the need to restrict the availability of these products to impressionable young people who are vulnerable to industry manipulation at the point of sale.¹³ Although this is only one approach the Rhode Island TCP has taken to help decrease smoking initiation and use among young people, these data offer a new perspective by capturing information on the retail environment that had not previously been available. The Rhode Island TCP is hopeful that this information will continue to help create policy, systems, and environmental changes to address tobacco use and initiation among young people.

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